

***Suite No. 2 from "Water Music"***

**Georg Frideric Handel (1685–1759)**

Written: 1717

Movements: Five

Style: Baroque

Duration: Ten minutes

Even though Georg Frideric Handel was German, he spent nearly four years studying Italian opera in Italy. His first job after returning to Germany in 1710 was as music master for Prince George, Elector of Hanover. The position had a generous travel allowance. Within a few months of his appointment, Handel went to London to produce Italian opera. He stayed there for nearly a year. In 1712, he asked Prince George for another leave to go to London. He got permission, "on condition that he engaged to return within a reasonable time." He didn't, and in 1713 Elector George fired him. Then things got awkward: Queen Anne of England died and Elector George was Anne's closest living Protestant relative. All of a sudden, the employer that dismissed Handel was now his king. (Somehow, things got patched over: Handel's *Te Deum* was sung at George's coronation.)

Händel wrote his *Water Music* for a boating party that King George I held in July of 1717. The king put his guests on boats and had them rowed up the river Thames to his house at Chelsea, where he served them dinner at one o'clock in the morning. Later, they all floated back to London, arriving at something like four o'clock. A contemporary report recounts:

At about eight in the evening, the King repaired to his barge. Next to the King's barge was that of the musicians, about 50 in number . . . but no singers. The music had been composed specially by the famous Händel, a native of Halle, and his Majesty's principal court composer. His Majesty's approval of it was so great that he caused it to be played three times in all; twice before and once after supper, even though each performance

lasted an hour.

Handel's *Water Music* is actually a set of three suites, each one in a different key and using a slightly different orchestra. Each suite follows the typical Baroque pattern with some sort of overture and then a series of stylized dances. Each dance has a distinctive rhythm that the English audience would have recognized.

One of King George I's last acts before his sudden death in June of 1727 was to sign "An Act for the naturalizing of George Frideric Handel."

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***Façade Suite No. 2***

**William Walton (1902–1983)**

Written: 1922–1937

Movements: Six

Style: Contemporary

Duration: Ten minutes

While William Walton attended Oxford University he became great friends with the poet (and, later, art critic) Sacheverell Sitwell who suggested to his siblings Osbert and Edith (who were very much part of the *avant-garde* of the literary scene) that they “adopt” William. Walton failed his exams at Oxford and spent the next fifteen years living and collaborating with the Sitwells. In April, 1922, Edith wrote a letter to an acquaintance and enclosed one her own books of poetry. “A good deal of the section called ‘Façade’ was written for music,” she wrote.

. . . and it was set by a youth called Walton—(whom I believe most strongly to be the best composer we’ve had since Purcell, though he is only just twenty) and I recited them down a kind of megaphone to this accompaniment, consisting of trumpet, clarinet, flute, drum and cello. It was very curious, and it was great fun doing it.

Edith later described her poems in *Façade*:

They are *abstract* poems—that is, they are patterns in sound; they are, too, in many cases, virtuoso exercises in poetry (of an extreme difficulty)—in the same sense as certain studies of Liszt are studies in transcendental technique in music. My experiments in “Façade” are in the nature of enquiries into the effect on rhythm, and on speed, of the use of rhymes, assonances and dissonances, placed outwardly and inwardly (at different places in the line) and in most elaborate patterns. They experimented, too, in the effect upon speed of the use of equivalent syllables--that system which produces

almost more variations than any other device.

When Walton wrote the music to accompany the narration of the poems, he used the rhythm of the words to influence what he wrote. He also relied heavily on the sounds of his day, so he included familiar dances like the waltz, polka, tango, paso-doble and tarantella. Walton kept adding to and revising his music for *Façade* for decades after he first wrote it. He also extracted two suites and expanded the instrumentation for full orchestras to play *without* the poetry. Even without it, Walton's *Façade* is a delightful, wry, and masterful set of vignettes.

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***Danzón No. 4***

**Arturo Marquez (1950–)**

Written: 1996

Movements: One

Style: Contemporary

Duration: Ten minutes

The son of a mariachi musician and grandson of a Mexican folksinger, Arturo Marquez came to the United States from Mexico as a young teenager with his family and settled in a suburb of Los Angeles. He played trombone in the high school band, took private piano lessons, and started composing when he was sixteen. He attended the Mexican Music Conservatory and later received a Master of Fine Arts from the California Institute of the Arts. Marquez began to achieve international fame with a series of compositions—called *Danzóns*—based on the music of Cuba and the Veracruz region of Mexico.

The *danzón* is a popular dance form, starting out as a European implant in Cuba and then making its way to Mexico via Veracruz. One writer likens the *danzón* to the Argentinean tango: “Both are urban dances with nostalgic, even sad melodies and a smoldering sensuality.”

Of his most popular piece, the *Danzón No. 2*, Arturo Marquez writes:

The idea . . . originated in 1993 during a trip to Malinalco with the painter Andrés Fonseca and the dancer Irene Martínez, both of whom are experts in salon dances with a special passion for the *danzón*, which they were able to transmit to me from the beginning, and also during later trips to Veracruz and visits to the Colonia Salon in Mexico City. From these experiences onward, I started to learn the *danzón*'s rhythms, its form, its melodic outline, and to listen to the old recordings by Acerina and his Danzonera Orchestra. I was fascinated and I started to understand that the apparent lightness of the *danzón* is only like a visiting card for a type of music full of sensuality

and qualitative seriousness . . .

Like *Danzón No. 2*, *Danzón No. 4* is based on a single rhythm, known as a *clave*. Over the clave rhythm, played by percussion, basses and piano, there is a veritable procession of who's who of instruments. Almost every instrument or section gets its chance with the melody that is at times sensuous, sometimes playful, and others almost demonic. The tempo varies from languorous to driving. The result is a type of hypnotic frenzy. Surprisingly, there is a sudden shift and the piece ends—peacefully!

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***Le Bœuf sur le Toit***

**Darius Milhaud (1892–1974)**

Written: 1920

Movements: One

Style: 20<sup>th</sup> century French

Duration: Fifteen minutes

Paris in the early part of the twentieth century was in the front lines of modern art. An iconoclastic bunch of young composers, labeled “Les Six” by a newspaper, gathered themselves around the composer Eric Satie and the poet Jean Cocteau. Members of “Les Six” included Georges Auric, Darius Milhaud, Arthur Honegger, Germaine Tailleferre, Louis Durey and Francis Poulenc. The organizing principle of this group was that French music must free itself from foreign traits, particularly the German ones. These composers used common life as their subject matter, and they celebrated and exploited machines in their music. They emulated the music hall and circus bands. They incorporated jazz into their “serious” music. The principle qualities of this new French music were “dryness, brevity, and straightforwardness”—and a great deal of irreverence and flippancy.

During World War I, Darius Milhaud went to Brazil to serve as secretary to the French ambassador there. In his autobiography *Notes Without Music*, Milhaud tells how, after his return from Brazil, he

assembled a few popular melodies, tangos, maxixes, sambas, and even a Portuguese fado, and transcribed them with a rondo-like theme recurring between each two of them. I called this fantasia *Le Bœuf sur le toit*, the title of a Brazilian popular song. I thought that the character of this music might make it suitable for an accompaniment to one of Charlie Chaplin’s films.

Instead of a film, Jean Cocteau proposed a scenario for a pantomime. He imagined a scene in a bar in America during Prohibition:

The Barman . . . offers everyone cocktails. After a few incidents and various dances, a Policeman enters, whereupon the scene is immediately turned into a milk-bar. The clients play a rustic scene and dance a pastorella as they sip glasses of milk. The Barman switches on a big fan which decapitates the Policeman. The Redheaded Woman executes a dance with the Policeman's head, ending by standing on her hands like the Salome in Rouen Cathedral. One by one the customers drift away, and the Barman presents an enormous bill to the resuscitated Policeman .

Milhaud recalls that he "had only aspired to create a merry, unpretentious divertissement in memory of the Brazilian rhythms that had so captured my imagination and never—no never—made me laugh."

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